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SUBJECT: MFA PUSHES FOR ANSWER ON TALKS

REF: Moore-Boehme Telcon 04/03/08

MFA Pushes for Response on Proposed Talks

1. (SBU) MFA Americas Directorate Chief Vadim Lazerko called in Charge April 7 to underscore the urgency of receipt of an answer to Belarus' willingness for talks between our Ambassadors in a third country. Lazerko stated that Belarus' decision to cut diplomatic staff in the U.S., and to demand reciprocal cuts by the USG, had not changed, but was merely postponed for the duration of these talks. If an answer was not received by the MFA prior to the return of FonMin Martynov, at 8:00 p.m. local time April 8, Lazerko -- speaking "personally" -- said he feared that Charge would be summoned to the MFA again April 9 to receive a list of the five diplomats permitted to remain in Belarus.

Lazerko also Raises Treatment of Diplomatic Staff, Visas

2. (SBU) Ambassador Lazerko also issued a verbal protest to Charge over the treatment of Belarus' Defense Attache (DATT) in Washington. According to Lazerko, the Belarusian DATT had been approached on two occasions in the last four days by a man of Estonian origin who asked the DATT to work for the USG. Lazerko noted that Belarus considered such approaches a security risk for their personnel; he added that the Department had already been informed of the incidents and would soon receive a formal protest note, with a photo of the man who made the alleged approaches.

3. (SBU) In addition, Lazerko sought clarification of a statement on the Embassy's web site that the Mission had once again suspended visa processing. The Belarusian diplomatic mission in the U.S. continued to offer the full range of consular services, according to Lazerko. He added that it seemed strange that the U.S. Embassy planned to send two officers to an April 8 trial in Polotsk but did not have sufficient staff to process visa applications. [Note: Lazerko confirmed that the MFA had not forbidden attendance at the trial, and he would look into whether a letter the Embassy received from Vitebsk authorities -- in which the visit was deemed "inexpedient" -- should be considered as a prohibition. End Note.]

Department Considering Request, Answer Hoped for Soon

4. (SBU) On proposed talks, Charge noted that Belarus' proposal differed somewhat from the original U.S. proposal, chiefly in that Belarus suggested that talks between the U.S. and Belarusian Ambassadors take place in a third country, rather than in Minsk or Washington. Charge said that he hoped a response to the proposal would be forthcoming from Washington by April 8 at the latest. Moreover, Charge acknowledged Lazerko's information on the alleged approaches to the Belarusian DATT and said that this was the first he had heard of the issue. He promised to report Lazerko's protest

to Washington.

Charge Repeats Protest on Lack of Access to Zeltser

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15. (SBU) On visa processing, Charge confirmed that the Embassy's Consular Section had not completely suspended visa processing, and the adjudication in less than 24 hours of the visa application of a Belarusian diplomat who intends to visit the U.N. was evidence of that fact. In addition to diplomatic visas, the section continued to process visas for summer respites for children from Chernobyl-affected regions. Charge noted, however, that with the recent staff cuts, the Consular Section had only one full-time American officer, whose first priority remained provision of services to American citizens in prison or in distress. Here the Charge repeated Embassy's protest of lack of regular consular access to AMCIT Emanuel Zeltser, currently imprisoned by the BKGB in Minsk. He noted that the Embassy had submitted an additional request to visit Zeltser several days ago, but had received no answer from the MFA or the BKGB.

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